

Sunday, December 2, 2018, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Shai Wosner, *piano*

PROGRAM

Franz SCHUBERT (1797–1828) Sonata in A minor, D. 845
Moderato
Andante poco mosso
Scherzo: Allegro vivace –
Trio. Un poco più lento
Rondo: Allegro vivace

SCHUBERT Sonata in D Major, D. 850, *Gasteiner*
Allegro vivace
Con moto
Scherzo: Allegro vivace
Rondo: Allegro moderato

INTERMISSION

SCHUBERT Sonata in G Major, D. 894
Molto moderato e cantabile
Andante
Menuetto & Trio
Allegretto

Steinway Piano

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Patron Sponsor Bernice Greene.
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Franz Schubert**Sonata in A minor, D. 845****Sonata in D Major, D. 850, *Gasteiner***

Schubert's health nearly collapsed for good during the spring of 1823, when his suffering from blinding headaches and vertigo became so acute that he had to be admitted to the Vienna General Hospital in May. His treatment for what was probably syphilis (mercury? his hair fell out and he had to wear a wig for some time until it grew back) proved temporarily successful, but his health remained troublesome thereafter. He recovered sufficiently to complete two dramatic works later that year—the opera *Fierabras* (not produced until 1897) and the incidental music for the extravagantly eccentric Wilhelmine von Chezy's play *Rosamunde* (a flop at its premiere in December)—and continued composing through the following year, when he began to turn his attention from songs and small piano pieces to the larger instrumental forms. He spent the summer of 1824 in Zseliz in Hungary, 150 miles east of Vienna, tutoring the daughters of Count Johann Esterházy in music, and was only too glad to get back to his friends and family in Vienna in September. Though he was subject to a rather painful loneliness in Zseliz, the quiet seems to have done his health some good, and his close friend, the painter Moritz von Schwind, reported that autumn that “Schubert is here, well and divinely frivolous, rejuvenated by delight and a pleasant life.” Schubert lived with his family outside the central city for a few months, and in February 1825, moved to the suburb of Wieden to be close to Schwind, whose company he sought out almost every day. It was during that spring, when his health had stabilized and his music was beginning to receive notice beyond the limits of his native Vienna, that Schubert composed his Piano Sonata in A minor, D. 845.

The A-minor Sonata of 1825 (the third he composed in that key; the earlier ones date from 1817 and 1823) was completed before Schubert left for a long summer holiday in Upper Austria with the singer Johann Vogl on May 20. The following four months, spent shuttling between Steyr, Gmunden, Gastein, and

Linz, were among the happiest he ever knew. His reputation was then spreading quickly among Austrian music lovers, and everywhere he went he found new friends and old admirers of his songs and piano pieces. “He looks so fit and strong, is so full of good spirits and so friendly and communicative, that one is really overjoyed to see it,” wrote Anton Ottenwald, his host in Linz in early July. Schubert carried the manuscript of the new sonata with him that summer, and created much enjoyment by playing it for music lovers at his various stops. From Steyr on July 25, he wrote to his parents, “What pleased especially were the variations [i.e., second movement] in my new sonata, which I performed alone and not without merit, since several people assured me that piano keys become singing voices under my fingers, which, if true, pleases me greatly, since I cannot endure the accursed chopping in which even distinguished pianists indulge and which delights neither the ear or the mind.” Soon after Schubert returned to Vienna at the beginning of October, the recently established firm of Anton Pennauer agreed to publish the work. The score was issued early the following year (with a dedication to Beethoven's most eminent pupil and patron, the Archduke Rudolph, who, by 1826, had been elevated to Cardinal-Archbishop of Olmütz in Moravia) as Schubert's “Premier Grande Sonate.” (His only other large-scale piano piece previously published was the *Wanderer* Fantasy of 1822.) The sonata received favorable notices in the important journals *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (Leipzig) and *Allgemeiner Musikalischer Anzeiger* (Frankfurt) during the following months, the first substantial reviews of any of his instrumental compositions. In July, he received a letter praising the sonata from the pianist, lecturer, and editor Georg Nägeli of Zurich, inviting him to contribute a work to a new anthology of keyboard music he was assembling. Schubert replied that he would be glad to participate, though nothing apparently ever came of Nägeli's invitation. Such international recognition made the summer of 1826 a time of considerable pride for Schubert, and justified his claim in an (unsuccessful

cessful) application for the post of *Kapellmeister* at the Habsburg court that his name was known “not only in Vienna, but throughout Germany.”

Kathleen Dale noted several essential stylistic elements of Schubert’s piano sonatas: “For him, sheer beauty of sound was an end in itself, and whatever his sonatas may lack in constructional strength, they gain in sublimity of tonal range, in graciousness of melody, in the unusual variety of rhythmical schemes, and in the exquisite beauty of the pianoforte writing. In his own treatment of form, Schubert showed great ingenuity and originality, as the analyst of his sonatas soon discovers—possibly to his surprise; certainly to his delight.” Unlike Beethoven, Schubert made no attempt to redefine the Classical four-movement sonata structure in his music, but sought rather to expand the genre’s emotional scope through greater lyricism and more far-flung harmonic peregrinations, qualities much in evidence in this sonata. The opening movement, sweetly nostalgic rather than heroically tragic, follows a leisurely sonata form: the first theme is marked by a snapping ornamental mordent, the second by a brief repeated-note pattern. The Andante is a set of variations, the only such movement in Schubert’s sonatas, based on the ingratiating melody heard immediately at the beginning. A scherzo of wide dynamic and harmonic range and a breathless rondo round out this handsome creation.

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In June 1825, during his extended summer vacation in Upper Austria, Schubert settled in Gastein, a then-fashionable Alpine resort famed for its mineral baths. It was in that idyllic setting that he composed his Piano Sonata in D Major, D. 850. The score was published the following year, one of the growing number of compositions that he correctly claimed were making his name widely known, though his enjoyment of his burgeoning renown was abruptly cut short by his death two years later, at the pitiable age of 31.

The spacious first movement of the D-Major Sonata opens with a main theme comprising a determined rising motive in short repeated notes and a lithe response in triplet scales, both nested in the fluid harmonic language that

characterizes the finest compositions of Schubert’s maturity. The second theme, begun in octaves, is gentler in spirit but it is broken into by a starkly contrasting passage whose open intervals suggest the call of an Alphorn or perhaps a folksong Schubert may have heard on his mountain holiday. (Schubert almost certainly borrowed this technique of bold, dramatic contrast from his hero Beethoven, who was then immersed in writing his last quartets.) The development section is largely concerned with the motivic components of the main theme. A full recapitulation of the exposition’s materials, including the “Alphorn” interruption, rounds out the movement.

The second movement is simple in construction—A–B–A–B–A—but subtle in detail. The opening section is one of those endearing wordless songs with which Schubert filled his instrumental creations; the “B” episode is subtly syncopated and more animated in nature. Both are elaborated on their returns, and then joined together in the final section, with the “A” melody urged on by the syncopated “B” rhythms. The Scherzo combines Schubert’s innate lyricism and his love of playing dance music for his friends with sterner dramatic touches, as though a cloud were passing across the sun; the central trio, with its smoothly flowing chord streams, is a virtual compendium of Schubert’s harmonic inventiveness. The closing Rondo is based on a theme of delightful naïveté whose returns, often wound about with delicate counterpoint, are separated by passages of complementary character.

Sonata No. 18 in G Major, D. 894

On January 31, 1827, Franz Schubert turned 30. He had been following a bohemian existence in Vienna for over a decade, making barely more than a pittance from the sale and performance of his works and living largely by the generosity of his friends, a devoted band of music-lovers who rallied around his convivial personality and exceptional talent. The pattern of Schubert’s daily life was firmly established by that time: composition in the morning; long walks or visits in the afternoon; companionship for wine and song in the evening. The routine was bro-

ken by occasional trips into the countryside to stay with friends or families of friends. A curious dichotomy marked Schubert's personality during those final years of his life, one that suited well the Romantic image of the inspired artist, rapt out of quotidian experience to carry back to benighted humanity some transcendent vision. "Anyone who had seen him only in the morning, in the throes of composition, his eyes shining, speaking, even, another language, will never forget it—though in the afternoon, to be sure, he became another person," recorded one friend. The duality in Schubert's character was reflected in the sharp swings of mood marking both his psychological makeup and his creative work. "If there were times, both in his social relationships and his art, when the Austrian character appeared all too violently in the vigorous and pleasure-loving Schubert," wrote his friend the dramatist Eduard von Bauernfeld, "there were also times when a black-winged demon of sorrow and melancholy forced its way into his vicinity; not altogether an evil spirit, it is true, since, in the dark concentrated hours, it often brought out songs of the most agonizing beauty." The ability to mirror his own fluctuating feelings in his compositions—the darkening cloud momentarily obscuring the bright sunlight—is one of Schubert's most remarkable and characteristic achievements, and touches indelibly the incomparable series of works—the *Great Symphony* in C Major; *Winterreise*; the late piano sonatas, String Quintet, piano trios,

and *Impromptus*—that he created during the last months of his brief life.

Robert Schumann called the Piano Sonata in G Major (D. 894), completed in October 1826, "Schubert's most perfect work, in both form and conception." The score was published in April 1827 as Schubert's Op. 78 by the Viennese firm of Tobias Haslinger with a dedication to Joseph von Spaun, a fellow student of Schubert at the School of the Court Chapel in Vienna who became a life-long friend, supporter, and frequent host of the convivial "Schubertiads" at which the composer's friends assembled to partake of the latest blossoms of his creativity.

The sonata's opening statement is floating, ethereal, and luminous, a Schubertian counterpart to the rapt timelessness of some of Beethoven's finest slow movements. The music takes on a greater urgency as its sonata form unfolds, mounting to moments of high drama in the development section, but reasserting its abiding halcyon state with the recapitulation. The Andante, evidence that Schubert had perfected a sublime melding of his vocal and instrumental gifts by his 29th year, is an extended song without words in alternating stanzas: A–B–A–B–A. The Menuetto, actually a vigorous Austrian *Ländler* rather than a descendent of the courtly 18th-century dance, is a reminder that Schubert wrote more practical dance pieces for the piano—over 400—than any other species of composition, save only solo songs. The finale is a spacious rondo of sun-dappled geniality.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Shai Wosner (*piano*) has attracted international recognition for his exceptional artistry, musical integrity, and creative insight. His performances of a broad range of repertoire—from Beethoven and Schubert to Ligeti and the music of today—reflect a degree of virtuosity and intellectual curiosity that has made him a favorite among audiences and critics.

Wosner continues his career-long, critically acclaimed engagement with Schubert's music in his latest recital series, *Schubert: The Great Sonatas*, comprising the composer's six final

sonatas, which he describes as "thick novels, rich with insight about the human condition." Along with today's performance, recitals take place at the Konzerthaus in Berlin, and in Buffalo (NY), Fresno, and Cambridge (MA). Wosner also performs works from his latest solo recording—*Impromptu* (Onyx Classics), featuring an eclectic mix of improvisationally inspired works by composers from Beethoven and Schubert to Gershwin and Ives—in Saint Paul and elsewhere. His concerto performances include appearances with the Detroit

and Toronto symphony orchestras (Mozart's Concerto No. 21); the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra (Brahms' Concerto No. 2), and the Alabama and Wichita Falls symphony orchestras, Musikalische Akademie of the National Theater Orchestra Mannheim, and Syracuse's Symphoria (Schumann's Piano Concerto). His chamber music collaborations include a six-city US tour with Orion Weiss playing works for four hands and two pianos by Schubert and Brahms with David Lang's companion pieces *gravity* and *after gravity*; and performances with the Emerson Quartet for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, New York Philharmonic musicians at David Geffen Hall, cellist Stephen Isserlis and violinist Laura Frautschi as part of Orpheus Chamber Orchestra's Twilight at Tarisio series; and violinist Jennifer Koh in a *Bridge to Beethoven* concert on Baltimore's Shriver Hall Concert Series.

In addition to *Impromptu*, *Wosner's* recordings for Onyx include concertos and capriccios by Haydn and Ligeti with the Danish National Symphony conducted by Nicholas Collon; solo works by Brahms and Schoenberg; works by Schubert, both on a solo recording and paired with new commissions from Missy Mazzoli; and Beethoven's complete works for cello and piano with Ralph Kirshbaum. He also performs Bartók, Janáček, and Kurtág on a recording with Jennifer Koh for Cedille.

Wosner is a recipient of Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award—a prize he used to commission Michael Hersch's concerto *Along the Ravines*, which he performed with the Seattle Symphony and the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie. He was in residence with the BBC as a New Generation Artist and is a former member of Lincoln Center's Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two). For several summers, *Wosner* was involved in the West-Eastern Divan Workshop led by Daniel Barenboim and toured as soloist with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. In the United States, he has appeared with the orchestras of Atlanta, Baltimore, Berkeley, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco, and the Saint Paul and Los Angeles chamber orchestras. *Wosner* has also performed with the Barcelona Symphony, Bournemouth Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Gothenburg Symphony, LSO St. Luke's, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Nieuw Sinfonietta Amsterdam, Orchestre National de Belgique, Staatskapelle Berlin, and the Vienna Philharmonic, among others.

Born in Israel, *Wosner* studied piano with Opher Brayer and Emanuel Krasovsky, as well as composition, theory, and improvisation with André Hajdu, and at the Juilliard School with Emanuel Ax.

For more information, please visit his fan page on Facebook, as well as shaiwosner.com.

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